



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOR

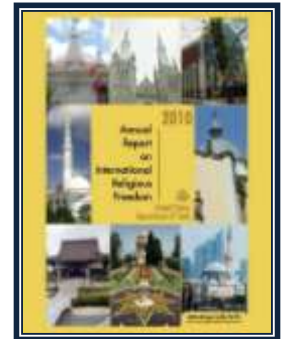
Religious freedom is protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and integrally connected to social stability, economic development, and national security. Restrictions on religious freedom violate human rights, fuel sectarian tensions, disenfranchise vulnerable minorities, and hinder the ability of faith-based groups to contribute fully to public life and the common good.

“My Administration will continue to oppose growing trends in many parts of the world to restrict religious expression. Faith can bring us closer to one another, and our freedom to practice our faith and follow our conscience is central to our ability to live in harmony.”

-President Barack Obama

The **International Religious Freedom Act** of 1998 (IRF Act), established the State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom, which carries out its mission by promoting religious freedom in the following ways:

- The IRF Act established the **Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom** as the head of the Office and the principal advisor to the President and Secretary of State on matters of religious freedom.
- As mandated by the IRF Act, the **Annual Report on International Religious Freedom** surveys the status of governmental and societal respect for religious freedom in 198 countries and territories.
- Over the last three years, the IRF Office has managed over \$10 million of the Human Rights and Democracy Fund spread over 15 programs, to support **religious freedom programming** around the world. Hundreds of NGOs have submitted proposals, demonstrating the significant interest in partnering with the Office.
- The IRF Office works closely with embassies, geographical bureaus and desks to track and advocate for individual religious freedom cases and broader religious freedom violations.
- The IRF Act requires the designation of **Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)** for “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.” The Office leverages CPC designation not as an end in itself, but as an effective tool for encouraging progress on religious freedom.
- The IRF Act calls for **training American diplomats** to effectively promote religious freedom around the world. The Office regularly participates in courses at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and recently worked closely with FSI to create a three-day course on “Religion and Foreign Policy” and a two-day interagency policy seminar on “Engaging Communities of Faith to Advance Policy Objectives.”
- As another avenue to educate diplomats, the Office chairs the Department’s **Religion & Global Affairs Forum**. Since its creation in April 2009, the Forum has hosted nearly 20



open-invitation seminars exploring the significance of religion and religious freedom in world affairs.

- Through intense lobbying, the IRF Office played an active role in the Department's multilateral efforts to counter the Organization of the Islamic Conference's (OIC) annual **"Defamation of Religions" resolution** in the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee that **included language limiting freedom of religion and freedom of expression**. The IRF Office staff also helped to provide a constructive action-oriented approach to address concerns of violence, discrimination, and intolerance without limiting freedom of religion and expression at the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly. At the March 2011 session of the Human Rights Council, the OIC introduced a substantially different resolution aimed at combating discrimination and intolerance without seeking bans on expression or furthering the "defamation" concept. The new resolution was adopted by consensus.
- The IRF Office significantly expanded its **engagement with inter-religious networks** as a means to advance religious freedom, foster respect, and decrease sectarian violence. The Office developed a strategic outreach package to address instances of potential violence directed at religious minorities and others.
- At the first **U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue** under the Obama administration in May 2010, religious freedom was one of the three main agenda items. Religious freedom issues were also raised at the annual bilateral consultations with each Central Asian country, as well as with Morocco and Jordan during separate bilateral talks.
- The IRF Office staffs the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and works closely with the Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Special Representative to Muslim Communities.

"Freedom of religion is the birthright of people of all faiths and beliefs in all places. The United States is committed to defending religious freedom around the world."

-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

USEFUL LINKS:

The Office of International Religious Freedom

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/index.htm>

The official United States Government website for human rights related information

www.humanrights.gov

The International Religious Freedom Report

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/>

For updates on the work of the Ambassador at Large and to learn more about the Office of International Religious Freedom, follow @IRFAmbassador and join

<http://www.facebook.com/RFAmbassador> on Facebook